

Faith and Humility

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I. INTRODUCTION

If you were to boil down to the heart and core of what God wants from you, what would it be? What has he desired most from the human beings he created? What is it that pleases him? Is it that we follow his rules? Is it that we try to be good people? Is it that he's lonely and wants our company? Is it that he needs to be loved and wants us to fulfill that love need? Let me just say: "No, no, no, no, and no." I think I answered them all! Our Triune God has been for all eternity and still is completely sufficient and content and loved and in need of nothing apart from himself. He doesn't need us or anything else to be complete in any way.

Instead, ultimately, the purpose of every created thing, including you and I, is to give glory to the Almighty, majestic, awesome, all-powerful, all-knowing, perfectly good, just, loving, merciful, holy, holy, holy God of the universe. Amen?! And whether we're listening or not, all creation is simply shouting the glory of God every moment of every day and every night. Every person on earth would see and hear this clear and loudly proclaimed message if they would honestly look around and consider the design and glory of the physical world and the living, reproducing, extremely complex plants and beings that are simply everywhere on the earth. If they would look into the night sky and consider what they see there.

- 1 The heavens are telling of the glory of God;
And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands.***
- 2 Day to day pours forth speech,
And night to night reveals knowledge.***
- 3 There is no speech, nor are there words;
Their voice is not heard.***
- 4 Their line has gone out through all the earth,
And their utterances to the end of the world.***

You see, the sun, moon, stars and galaxies are simply shouting the glory of God...the Hubble space telescope continues to reveal more and more of the glory

of God and his incredible creativity...yet most human beings have put ear plugs in and put on special glasses that block out God and short-circuit their brains.

All of non-talking creation, including mountains and grasslands and oceans and animals and birds and plants and the sun, moon and stars, gladly and constantly declare the glory and creativity of Almighty God. However, those of us who have been given that special gift of being able to speak audible words, have squandered that amazing gift and used it to exalt ourselves above the One who created us. Our bodies still declare the glory of God whether we want them to or not, but our words and actions have taken on a life of their own.

So how do we declare the glory of God with our lives? How do we walk the way he has designed us to walk? Well, the way we give glory to God is by simply trusting him, walking through life in faith and allowing him to guide and direct us, pouring out his perfect love and grace and power as we go. Simple faith and trust in God is what pleases Him and brings him glory...a true and authentic faith that is shown to be real in our words and actions.

If you'll remember, faith and trust in God was the target of Satan's initial attack on human beings in the Garden of Eden. He created doubt in Adam and Eve's minds about the goodness and intentions of God, and despite all the amazing evidences of his goodness and tender care and perfect provision, they threw out simple faith and allowed doubt to take root and lead them into rebellion against the One who loved and cared for them most. And the consequences of that choice and the choices of all human beings that followed is evident all around us everywhere.

So today, we're going to continue our journey into faith that we began with the shield of faith a few weeks ago. As I was studying faith in Scripture while preparing that sermon, I was reminded of how central it is to all of God's interactions with us. It's the core of what he desires from us; it's the roadmap to peace; it's our very salvation and life; it's what Satan is most trying to destroy in each of us; and it's the one thing that unequivocally, without a doubt, pleases God. In fact, without it, we CANNOT please God, as we will see in our study.

Today, we're just going to begin this study and then we'll work through it more in the coming weeks, wrapping up with what God teaches us in the "Hall of Faith" in

Hebrews chapter 11. Ultimately, our goal will be to learn how to cultivate and grow faith in our own lives, activating that perfect shield of faith offered to us by God.

II. THE CENTRALITY OF FAITH IN SCRIPTURE

I'd like to focus first on the importance of faith throughout God's Word. Some who have misunderstood Scripture have tried to argue that the Old Testament was about living by the Law and that salvation in those times was by keeping its requirements, while in the New Testament God introduced salvation by faith. But that is simply not true. Number one, no one would have been saved because Jesus Christ is the only One who has ever been able to fulfill the law's requirements. And number two, faith is identified as the path to righteousness and salvation all the way back in Genesis. Salvation has been by faith since the beginning of time. We're told in Scripture that Abel, Enoch and Noah all gained approval through their faith...they were each imperfect people who pleased God by simply trusting him and doing what he said.

And nowhere is this truth more clearly proclaimed than in Genesis chapter 15, verses 1 through 6, where the LORD came to Abram in a vision and said:

***"Do not fear, Abram,
I am a shield to you;
Your reward shall be very great."***

2 Abram said, "O Lord God, what will You give me, since I am childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" 3 And Abram said, "Since You have given no offspring to me, one born in my house is my heir." 4 Then behold, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, "This man will not be your heir; but one who will come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir." 5 And He took him outside and said, "Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be." 6 Then he believed in the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.

Here was Abram, old as the hills, and childless. He had long ago given up hope that he and his wife would have children. People would have laughed at him if he

had suggested that his old wife would still be able to have a child. And yet God told him to look up to the night sky and believe that not only would his old wife have a child, but that the descendants of that child would one day be as numerous as the stars in the sky. And the amount of stars Abram could see and try to count in the dark night sky of a desert would be way beyond what most of us have ever seen. But instead of letting doubt creep in and allowing his skeptical side to take over, Abram chose to simply believe God, knowing that the One who had created all the stars and planets was perfectly capable of bringing this miraculous thing about.

And the beautiful thing is that God responded to Abram's simple faith and trust, by crediting righteousness to his account. God didn't consider Abram righteous because he kept the requirements of the law perfectly or never made mistakes, but because he simply chose to trust God. This statement, "...[Abram] believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness," is quoted no less than three times in the New Testament; so I'd say it's a pretty significant truth we should pay attention to.

Faith is core to what God desires from each of us in our walk with him. Faith in Jesus Christ and his work on the cross is our very salvation and new life, and faith is also the underlying foundation and life-blood of our walk through life with him. When we let Satan destroy it or lead us astray from it, we're dead in the water.

This centrality of faith is woven throughout both the Old and New Testaments. It IS what pleases God, and without it we cannot please him.

This truth is clearly stated for us in Hebrews chapter 11, verses 1 through 6:

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. 2 For by it the men of old gained approval. 3 By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible. 4 By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks. 5 By faith Enoch was taken up so that he would not see death; AND HE WAS NOT FOUND BECAUSE GOD TOOK HIM UP; for he obtained the witness that before his

being taken up he was pleasing to God. 6 And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

By faith the men of old gained approval, and by faith you and I understand truths about God. Faith was the key for the men of old and is still the key for you and I as we walk with the Lord and seek to please him and know him. Without it, it is IMPOSSIBLE...don't miss that word...IMPOSSIBLE...that means there's no way it can happen...it's like trying to get to the moon on a ladder...or trying to fly by flapping your arms...or trying to walk on a puffy, white cloud...You and I CANNOT please God without coming to him and walking with him in simple faith and trust, believing that he exists, that he is with us always, that he is completely and perfectly good, and that his word is true and effective...and continuing to trust through both the good and hard times. This is simply what pleases God. If you want to know how to please him, this is it! And there are tremendous rewards for those walk through life this way.

But if, after all that, you're still wondering if faith is important at all to God, consider these Scriptures:

Galatians 5:5-6

5 For we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness. 6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love.

We as believers are to walk through the Spirit, by faith. The core of what matters now and the engine that moves us forward is faith, working through love.

And consider:

2 Corinthians 5:6-9

6 Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord — 7 for we walk by faith, not by sight — 8 we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord. 9 Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him.

The Lord is pleased when we walk by faith, choosing to trust him even when the difficulties and challenges we face in life and the constant whispered lies of the devil tempt us to doubt God and his Word...even when by all appearances things are falling apart and out of control and seem too difficult for us to handle. And we will come out victorious when we continue to trust God and his Word.

Listen to 1 John 5, verses and believe it:

2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments. 3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome. 4 For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world — our faith. 5 Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

We are born again and we victoriously overcome the world through faith in Jesus Christ.

III. THE STRUGGLE WITH DOUBT

But what about doubt? Do you struggle with doubt and skepticism? If we're honest, we've all struggled with doubt from time to time in our lives, haven't we? Take heart, you're not alone. But as you look at your life right now, where would you say you are today in your faith journey? How easy is it for you to trust God? If we had a scale with doubt on one side and faith on the other, where would you put yourself right now?

Let's face it, some of us have a harder time trusting than others. Some people just have extremely skeptical tendencies, while others find it much easier to trust. Some people can even be too trusting of other people and get burned for it. And our ability to trust can have a lot to do with our experience in life and how often other people have broken our trust. But we can all take comfort in knowing that God can conquer our doubt. He can take the tiny faith we begin with and turn it into a faith that moves mountains. And there's no possible way to be too trusting of God, because he is completely and utterly trustworthy!

We can find some encouragement in this process by knowing that one of Jesus' own hand-picked disciples struggled with doubt and wanting absolute proof before believing...the well-known doubting Thomas. And we see in Scripture that Jesus didn't write him off and say, "I'm done with you because you just don't have enough faith." Instead he had patience with him and helped walk him past his doubt. He provided him with some evidence, but then encouraged him to move beyond the doubt and experience the incredible blessings that will come only to those who choose to trust him without having to have every question and mystery answered first...those who recognize the vast amount of evidence God has already given us and choose to trust in him and his goodness through the mysteries, unanswered questions and difficulties of life.

Jesus challenged Thomas: “***...do not be unbelieving, but believing...Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed.***” There are incredible blessings that come when we choose to walk by faith and simply trust God. And the challenge Jesus gave to Thomas remains for each of us: do not be unbelieving, but believe...not with blind faith, but faith with a rock solid foundation of evidence in creation, the Word of God, history, and our own personal experience of salvation and the presence of God. God has already given us all the evidence we will ever need to be able to trust him through the challenges of life. But we have to make that choice to do it each time, because Satan will be there in every difficulty to lead us into doubt.

IV. FAITH BEGINS AND GROWS WITH HUMILITY

So how do we grow past our doubt? How do we begin sprouting faith and killing doubt in our lives? Well, there's an important verse in Habbakuk that provides us with a clue as to where faith begins...where it germinates and begins to sprout. This verse points us to an important starting point as we consider how to cultivate and grow our faith. Habbakuk 2, verse 4 says this:

**4 "Behold, as for the proud one,
His soul is not right within him;
But the righteous will live by his faith.**

I want you to notice a contrast in this verse. We have on one hand a prideful person...a person who is confident in his own brain power and abilities...a person

who thinks he's pretty smart and able to figure things out on his own...maybe a person who has a sharp intellect and wants absolute proof of everything. And this verse very clearly states that there's a major problem with this kind of person: "His soul is not right within him." There is something seriously amiss in the soul of a prideful person.

On the other hand we have a humble person...a person who doesn't trust in himself and his own wisdom, but who rather lives by his faith...a person who realizes he doesn't have a complete grasp on all the knowledge in the world...a person who recognizes his need for wisdom and guidance from someone who knows a lot more than he does.

What I'd like us to see here in this verse is that humility is the seed of a growing faith...it's the prerequisite, you might say, of being able to walk by faith. It's where faith begins. Without humility, we will have no use for faith. Doubt and skepticism have their roots in pride and confidence in our own wisdom and brain power.

Do you know anyone in your life whose confidence in their own intellect and brain power is the biggest stumbling block to their being able to accept the gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ? I can think of a specific person very close to me right now whose sharp intellect has led him to think he can sit in judgment of God and that he has educated himself enough to see through the Bible and recognize that it's just a religious fairy tale. And he says things like, "If that's what God is like I don't want anything to do with him."

I'm sure most of you have heard people speak this way: "I'll never believe in a God that would allow such suffering and evil in the world." They've analyzed the eternal and all-knowing Creator and Sustainer of the universe and decided they can judge with their finite and extremely limited perspective and knowledge that he's either not real at all or at best he's not nice enough for them. But I'd wager that they'd not be too eager to accept the alternative of God simply meting out justice immediately for any sins that people commit. That would take care of the evil problem in the world, wouldn't it? The only problem is: there'd be no one left on the planet because all of us sin and fall short of the glory of God and deserve justice. We'd each be done in a hurry!

It's so easy, isn't it, to sit in judgment of God and think we know better? But when we do this, professing to be wise, we become fools. Despite the enormous amount of evidence that points to the One true God as revealed in the Bible, most people prefer to create and accept any alternative explanation of the origin of the universe and the purpose for our existence than what is revealed in the Bible. And when they do this, God gives them over in their pride to this fantasy and to the consequences that result from living life without him.

There was no suffering, was there, in the garden of Eden? The suffering has come as a result of man's sin and refusal to simply trust and obey our good and gracious God. The suffering has come from following Satan's lies rather than trusting God's perfect Word in dependent humility. And according to Habbakuk 2:4, something is deeply wrong in our souls when we allow ourselves to walk in pride and sit in judgment of God.

As we consider today how to walk through our lives in unswerving faith, like our father Abraham, we need to recognize that our faith sprouts and grows when we return to true and authentic humility. This is where our very salvation begins in fact...returning to childlike faith...humbling ourselves and accepting the simple message of the gospel...a gospel that seems like foolishness to the proud who are perishing, but for us who will humbly believe is the very power of God bringing new life and returning us to that faith walk with our Creator for which he originally designed us.

We've seen humility over and over again in our Ephesians study...with all humility and gentleness, walk worthy...give yourselves up for others like Christ did for you...submit yourselves to one another... walk by the Spirit, rather than relying on your own strength and wisdom. And we see this same emphasis all throughout Scripture. Pride is based on self-reliance. Humility is what leads to God-dependence.

V. CONCLUSION

As we close today, I'd like you to think about the conversations you have with yourself in your own faith struggles. How could God allow this to happen to me? Why didn't God answer my prayer the way I wanted? God must not care about me since he hasn't taken away this problem? And think about the underlying

element in all of these questions. They're all based on me with my limited perspective and finite mind, sitting in judgment of God for not working things out the way I wanted. I think I know best and I'm mad that God didn't follow my plan.

And my friends, this is right where Satan wants each of us to be in the challenges and difficulties of life. You can know that he'll be there whispering to you: "God is not good. How could he love you if he allowed this kind of pain in your life? How can you trust a God who would let this happen?" Satan is constantly whispering lies, stirring up bitterness, and encouraging us to sit in prideful judgment of God. And the key to winning this battle and to growing our faith is humility... recognizing and constantly reminding ourselves that the eternal God knows all things from beginning to end, has much bigger purposes in mind, is always working for our good whether we see it or not, will walk closely with us and carry us through the hardest of times, and will complete the work he has begun in our lives as we continue to trust him.

Having questions of God is not wrong. We all do and God's not afraid of our questions. Life is extremely hard to understand sometimes and the pain we experience is sometimes unimaginable. But as we work through those questions, let us always remain in humility, recognizing our limited perspective, rejecting Satan's temptation to judge God and turn away from him, and choosing to trust our good God who forewarned us ahead of time that in this world we will have trouble. But let's take heart. Jesus Christ has overcome the world, and so will we as we choose to walk in humility and continue trusting him! Choose to simply trust him and his Word, and let that trust lead you to godly action. This is what pleases and glorifies God and leads us to fruitfulness and joy in our lives.